

VZCZCXRO9734
OO RUEHIK RUEHPOD RUEHYG
DE RUEHSL #0029/01 0231650
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 231650Z JAN 08 ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1470
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000029

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [LO](#) [PO](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OBSITNIK'S COURTESY CALL ON FORMER
PRIME MINISTER DZURINDA

BRATISLAVA 00000029 001.3 OF 002

ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR

PLEASE ZFR ALL SECTIONS AND ASSOCIATED MCNS OF
BRATISLAVA 000029 DTG 231650Z JAN 08 IMI ALL
SECTIONS AND ASSOCIATED MCNS. MESSAGE WILL BE
REVIEWED AND SENT WITH A NEW MRN. THANKS.

ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR ZFR

BRATISLAVA 00000029 002 OF 002

charges were "absolute rubbish," adding that he would welcome any inquiries into the deal. He said that Fico has raised the issue in retaliation for his move to launch a no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister in December. (Comment: Fico recently characterized the privatization the "largest theft in Slovak history" and said the government plans to make the SPP inquiry a top priority. End comment.) For his part, Dzurinda told the Ambassador he intends to mount another no-confidence vote in the next session of Parliament. I "am preparing my party and my country for a tough fight in two years," Dzurinda added. Noting the polemical nature of some of the recent exchanges between the government and the opposition -- and the media's portrayal of the rivalry between Dzurinda and Fico -- Ambassador asked about personalizing what are serious and substantive policy disputes. Dzurinda acknowledged that personalizing the dispute had not been very effective and noted that while he would play a leading role, he would not be the only face of the opposition in the months ahead. (Comment: There is significant disgruntlement among SDKU members that Dzurinda is not allowing effective politicians within the party due influence over party tactics and strategy. End comment.)

Fico's Foreign Policy: "Not Normal"
=====

5.(C) Dzurinda was sharply critical of PM Fico's statements with respect to U.S. engagement in Iraq, on Missile Defense and regarding Cuba. "Is this normal?" he asked repeatedly. Regarding U.S. missile defense plans, which he characterized as a "benefit" for Slovakia, Dzurinda shared his surprise at the position taken by the new Polish government. Dzurinda praised Tusk as a "very good man," but added that he lacked experience. Dzurinda said he planned to see Tusk during his

January 18 visit to Bratislava and would urge him to take a more positive -- less transactional -- approach to his discussions with the U.S. Dzurinda opined that DefMin Sikorsky was the main force behind the current approach, calling him "too clever," but also suggested that Tusk felt the need to show (perhaps a bit naively) that he could manage the "Russia issue." In the end, Dzurinda said, he was fairly confident the Poles would come around. He would remind Tusk, he said, of the importance of partnership with the U.S. (Note: in an separate encounter on January 17, former FM and current SDKU MP Eduard Kukan suggested to DCM that Dzurinda seems to have begun to accept the outcome on Kosovo, including that the GOS will likely join its EU partners in recognizing an independent Kosovo within the next several months. Kukan implied that Dzurinda would take a more measured approach to the issue than he had last year.)

16. (C) Comment and conclusion. Although Dzurinda's ratings are down, he remains as feisty as ever. There is no question that Dzurinda sincerely believes that the U.S. should be Slovakia's pre-eminent partner. At the same time, drawing parallels between Fico and Meciar, and trumpeting the role of the U.S. Ambassador, he suggested that Ambassador Obsitnik use his bully pulpit to speak out against the government (and implicitly for him). He has become more realistic about the current political context. Reflecting again on the challenges the opposition faces, Dzurinda grabbed a pen and paper and sketched out the coalition that could have been, had he won in 2006: SDKU, the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK), the Christian Democrats (KDH) and Meciar's HZDS. Dzurinda asserted that this was a viable group (we are not so sure) that would have been much better for the country than the current coalition, but added that such an arrangement was no longer possible given Fico's popularity. After more than 18 months out of office, it appears that Dzurinda may have finally let go his hopes for a near-term return to government via some sort grand coalition. If that it is the case, he might begin to be a more effective opposition leader. On the other hand, he is unwilling or unable to hear the message -- sent loudly by the polls and echoed by at least some of his advisors -- that, at least for now, tactics such as no-confidence votes lower his credibility and that of the opposition -- not the Prime Minister's.

OBSITNIK